

# James L. Holly, M.D.

## Your Life Your Health

### *Medical Home News Part I*

#### Interview Questions for Dr. Larry Holly

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In preparation for an article about SETMA, the following questions were posed to Dr. Holly. Over the next several weeks, this column will review some of these questions and their answers.

1. You have an extraordinary passion for your practice, your patients, and your pursuit of excellence. Where does that passion come from?
2. You built your own Electronic Health Record system at SETMA. Why did you feel the need to do that?
3. Your Community Council gives your patients a very strong voice in SETMA governance and operations. Were any of your staff or doctors worried about that when you first set it up?
4. You and your team have successfully earned recognition/accreditation already from AAAHC, NCQA, The Joint Commission, and URAC -- which is a lot of work -- and you're now looking at Planetree. Anybody there getting "accreditation fatigue"?
5. What advice do you have for practices that want to begin (and continue) the transformation journey to become a patient-centered medical home?
6. Finally, tell us something about yourself that few people would know.

**The first question is, "You have an extraordinary passion for your practice, your patients, and your pursuit of excellence. Where does that passion come from?"**

My father did not go to college but started work as a laborer with Louisiana Power & Light Company. In 1947, when I was four, we moved to a company house at Camp Livingston, a decommissioned military base outside of Ball, La. My family of four shared a two-bedroom house with another family. My father traveled to Monroe, Louisiana every Monday morning and returned Friday night. Within a year, he ran the power station and we moved to Natchitoches, Louisiana where he ran the power company's interests over a large part of north Louisiana including Camp Polk which would become Fort Polk. Graduate engineers were sent to him for training. I watched his drive and energy and his commitment to excellence without supervision and without guidance. I saw rich, educated and powerful men defer to my father because of his character and drive. I learned.

Years later, I was riding down an unpaved, country road with my father when he stopped his truck and yelled to a man plowing in the field. John Tom walked over and my father said, "I thought you were going to be by the house last Friday?" John Tom said, "One of the kids got sick but I'll be there this week." As we drove on, I asked my father what that was about. He said, "John Tom couldn't pay his light bill and I paid it for him." This was Louisiana and my

father was Caucasian and John Tom was African-American. I learned. He would never let children go without heat and power. Although he made less than \$5,000 a year, he was never without money to help others.

As my social liberalism grew, my father expressed concern. He had lived his life one way but had never opposed his culture, as I started doing aggressively when I was 17. I told him, "Daddy, everything I believe and everything I do, I learned from you." As my personal faith grew, it only reinforced the lessons I had learned from my father until I would define myself as "a social liberal, a fiscal conservative and a theological fundamentalist." My father is deceased but I still live with a desire to be like him, to be a man of integrity, honor, compassion, and of fearlessness.

The other great influence on and driver of my life is the overwhelming gratitude which I feel toward my society and my profession for the honor of being a physician. I still stand in awe of having the privilege of being a physician. As I watched and re-watch the movie *Secretariat*, I am moved almost to tears at the portrayal of his running of the Belmont Stakes in 1973. After a brief moment, he is no longer running to beat other horses. He is running for the sheer joy of running. *Secretariat* is competing only with himself and his achievement was breathtaking. I realized the reason I was drawn to this race is that I have come to the point in my life when I am working for the sheer joy of my work. I have frequently said, "I have a passion for which I am owed no credit and over which I have no control as it is a gift from God."

In the movie *Saving Private Ryan*, Ryan, now in his seventies, approached the headstone of Captain John Miller who gave his life that Ryan could live. In perhaps the most poignant moment in a great film, tears stream down his face, as Ryan plaintively said to his wife, "Tell me that I have lived a good life; tell me that I have been a good man." The sacrifice of others, imposed upon Private Ryan a debt only a noble and honorable life could repay. My debt did not originate so dramatically but it still exists.

There are few gifts as great as that of the opportunity to be a physician. The trust of caring for others has always been a sacred trust. It is a trust which should cause each person so honored to tremble with fear that he/she will not have lived worthily of that honor. It should cause us to examine our lives for evidence that we have been good stewards of the treasure of knowledge, skill, experience, and judgment which has been bequeathed to us by our university, our professors and the public which funded our education.

What nobler calling could one have than the opportunity to collaborate with others in their quest for health and hope? The honor of trust and respect given by strangers, who share their deepest secrets, knowing they will be held sacrosanct, is a gift which exceeds any pecuniary advantage. The pursuit of excellence in the care of others is a passion which is self-motivating.

Passion is the fuel which energizes any noble endeavor. It is what makes a person get up early in the morning, work hard all day, and go to bed late at night looking forward to the next day. It is a cause of great sadness that today's society is so devoid of true purpose-driven passion. Many only vicariously experience passion through the eyes and lives of athletes, movie stars,

or musicians. Ultimately, passion and purpose are what make life worth living. Those of us, who have been allowed the privilege of being physicians, can and should know the passion of a noble purpose every day of our lives.

The greatest gift I have been given is passion for my patients, my practice and for the pursuit of excellence. The details of this story can be found at:

- <http://www.jameslhollymd.com/Your-Life-Your-Health/pdfs/Memories-on-the-Auditorium-Dedication.pdf>
- <http://www.jameslhollymd.com/In-The-News/pdfs/mission-magazine-a-call-to-heal-a-call-to-serve.pdf>
- <http://www.jameslhollymd.com/Your-Life-Your-Health/pdfs/the-honor-of-being-a-physician.pdf>